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# Articles in Today's Clips

**Friday, August 1, 2008**

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## The Grand Rapids PRESS

# Safer, effective foster care

Friday, August 01, 2008

Michigan has struggled to provide safe and effective foster care for children. Governor Granholm and lawmakers needed to make repairing the flawed system a top priority long before being slapped with a lawsuit for its failures. A recent settlement of that suit pumps an estimated \$200 million into the foster care program, finally investing the resources necessary to protect kids. State leadership must see to it that money actually results in the Department of Human Services (DHS) assuring that foster parents and adoptive parents are suitable and that foster homes are safe and stable.

Children's Rights, the New York-based advocacy group, sued the state in 2006 on behalf of 19,000 children in its care, signaling a system in crisis. A settlement was reached last month, just days before the trial. That's probably best. Things looked bleak for the state. An independent report ordered by a U.S. District judge released this winter found that caseworkers failed to make required face-to-face visits, failed to conduct background checks before placing children, and failed to make sure children were receiving medical and dental services.

The settlement establishes a much-needed plan to fundamentally reform DHS's system. Many of the department's problems have been related to staffing, management and structure. One of the most significant requirements in the settlement is to add 700 foster care workers. That would be an increase of about 430 employees, since the budget already calls for about 270 additional workers. This helps with another requirement of the suit: reducing caseloads. Foster care and adoption workers are to have no more than 15 cases, and child protective workers no more than 12. Workers now average more than 30 cases at one time. That unmanageable amount puts children at risk.

In recent years, the state has admitted to missteps involving oversight of children such as 7-year-old Ricky Holland, of Williamston. This summer the Michigan Court of Appeals upheld the murder conviction of his adoptive mother. Several mistakes were made in Ricky's case. After the arrest of Tim and Lisa Holland in 2006, state officials pledged reforms and did begin making changes, but nothing as aggressive or extensive as in the settlement.

In addition to more workers, components of the settlement require the state to:

- Establish a position of medical director overseeing policies related to medications and medical services for children under DHS care.
- Increase education and training requirements for caseworkers and supervisors on the front-lines who need to notice red flags, enforce state law and carry out DHS procedures.
- Revise management structure to provide greater support and oversight.
- Immediately identify kids in need of permanent homes, giving priority to those waiting more than a year for adoption.

Revamping the system will cost the state about \$50 million annually over the next four years. How the reforms will be paid for is still unknown, other than through a combination of state and federal funds. Obviously, addressing the DHS repairs means some other state needs won't get funded or will get less funding. The governor and lawmakers should never allow problems to get so bad in a state department again that this type of costly overhaul is necessary.

Children's Rights has pursued other state child care systems, acting as a needed watchdog for vulnerable children. This settlement is expensive but necessary. Children removed from abusive and neglectful homes should be able to rely on the state to better their condition.

# Letters for August 1

Friday, August 01, 2008

## **Criminal care**

Just when I think it can't get any worse in the State of Michigan, the front page of The Press reads: "State overlooked 1,900 convicts in daycare jobs" (July 23). I thought it was a misprint, until I realized that misprints aren't likely in the headline.

This blows me away. We're not talking about 19 people but 1,900 convicted of everything from child abuse to murder. The story stated that four of these people were actually in prison at the time they received their licenses and were paid over \$4,600 on top of that.

Scott Strong, deputy state auditor general says that these convicts might now be charged with fraud. Oooh, that'll teach 'em. Sitting right at the top of this outrageous mess is our governor, Jennifer Granholm. Isn't she the one who's supposed to be running this state?

I have a feeling that none of her kids ever spent any time in a state licensed daycare program. If they had, this probably never would have happened. When is the next governor's election?

-- MIKE DAVIS/Wyoming

Friday, August 1, 2008

## Slain woman warned about suspect

**Man to be charged with murder, dismembering of 26-year-old at his Kalkaska County cabin.**

**Christine Ferretti / The Detroit News**

**BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP** -- Sarah Elizabeth Wilson was a complicated woman.

She was a mother and aspiring radio broadcaster who spent years holding down various jobs, struggling to overcome alcoholism and coping with bipolar disorder.

Wilson, 26, learned her lessons the hard way -- bouncing from her family in Big Rapids to a Bloomfield Township engineer who family said fueled her addiction to alcohol.

In January, she moved to Oakland County to live with longtime acquaintance David Christian DeJonge.

Her family warned her that DeJonge was bad news; now they believe that relationship may have cost Wilson her life.

DeJonge is in jail, facing life in prison, charged with murdering Wilson and mutilating her body at his cabin in Kalkaska County.

"We told Sarah this (guy) is bad medicine," her father, Patrick Wilson, 58, said Thursday. "She gravitated to him. They were probably drinking buddies."

The 45-year-old man became obsessed with Wilson after they met in a Grand Rapids nightclub where she worked around 2002, friends say.

In early May, when she decided to return home to straighten out her life, prosecutors say, DeJonge's obsession took control.

The pair traveled to DeJonge's Orange Township hunting cabin about 80 miles from her parents' home in Big Rapids. Prosecutors said she drank and DeJonge killed and dismembered her, ditching her torso in a secluded swamp.

"She was trying to move on (in her life) and he didn't like it," said Kalkaska County Prosecuting Attorney Brian Donnelly. "The extent of the efforts to conceal her identity ... it's quite ghastly."

DeJonge is expected to appear in 46th Circuit Court next week for an arraignment on open murder and dismemberment charges.

A preliminary hearing was Wednesday.

The path to the gruesome discovery began when Wilson failed to return home for a visit on Mother's Day weekend in May.

Instead, police launched a search. Witnesses last saw Wilson with DeJonge on May 9.

The investigation led police to a blood-covered wheelbarrow inside DeJonge's cabin May 15 and Wilson's torso a week later in a swamp about five miles away from the 80-acre property.

In June, DeJonge was charged with the murder.

"This guy has a history of roughing up women," Donnelly said.

"He has a criminal history that includes assault."

Relatives of DeJonge and his attorney, Peter Shuman, declined comment Thursday.

DeJonge was convicted of assault in 2004, according to Michigan Department of Corrections records.

Bloomfield Township Police Capt. Steve Cook said Thursday that in late May, he was charged on unrelated prescription drug fraud and was held in the Oakland County Jail.

He was charged June 20 in Kalkaska with Wilson's murder and remains in that county's jail.

Cook said Bloomfield Township officers found human blood and a container with Wilson's belongings in his car and he "told numerous stories about what happened and the last place he saw her."

Michigan State Police said the investigation is ongoing as officers continue to search for Wilson's remains.

"This has left a huge hole in our hearts," Patrick Wilson said. "When I think of the horror and my daughter is truly gone forever a psychological shield goes up and I deny she's gone."

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## **The Associated Press**

**August 01, 2008 09:32AM**

An Oakland County man has been ordered to stand trial on charges he killed and dismembered a former Big Rapids woman in Kalkaska County.

David Christian Dejonge of Bloomfield Township was bound over this week to stand trial in Kalkaska County Circuit Court. The 44-year-old is charged with open murder and mutilating a corpse.

Dejonge is accused of killing 26-year-old Sarah Elizabeth Wilson, who was last seen May 8. Her torso was discovered in a swampy area of Kalkaska's Oliver Township later that month. Dejonge's defense attorney, Peter Shumar, declined to comment.

# Underground Railroad domestic violence shelter plans resale store

by Jill Armentrout | The Saginaw News  
Friday August 01, 2008

Donations to the Underground Railroad often fill the entryway at the Saginaw shelter for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Clothing and new items go into storage in the basement for clients who come to the emergency shelter with nothing, said Mary Sue Barry, community development manager. Furniture and housewares just don't fit.

"We filled two large vans moving stuff out," she said. "That was six weeks' worth."

Those goods have a home at the nonprofit agency's new resale store. Under the Rainbow, 5645 State in Saginaw Township, will supplement the shelter's operating income, provide job training to clients and increase bedroom space in the facility on South Washington.

The advocacy agency's "Opening Doors" capital campaign has raised \$450,000 of the \$635,000 needed, officials said.

The store opens Tuesday, Sept. 2.

"Other domestic violence agencies have opened resale stores, and we studied their business plans," said Valerie Hoffman, director and chief operating officer. "We surveyed donors to make sure we could sell some things."

The shelter is over capacity, with 16 families in residence on a typical night, Hoffman said. Others remain on a waiting list, leaving them in possible harm, she said. Last year, the agency turned away more than 700 people who didn't face imminent danger, she said.

"We've been at critical levels for three years. It's very difficult on the clients and the staff to operate under such conditions," Hoffman said. "There are no additional state or federal dollars, so we have to do this ourselves. Ideally, the store will generate enough money for new services."

Moving offices to the shelter's first floor will free the entire second floor for clients' rooms, adding nine bedrooms for a total of 20. About 300 clients use the shelter's housing each year. About 30 staff members run the shelter in shifts. Seven financial and other administrative staffers on the first floor will move to the store.

The agency spent \$200,000 on a down payment for the store and to make mortgage payments.

"The most expensive part will be making office space in the store," Hoffman said. "Renovations at the shelter will include putting in another bathroom, buying furniture and flooring.

"We hope to have everything done by the end of the year. We can't wait any longer."

Part of the campaign includes giving shelter tours to potential donors and volunteers.

"It's not a secret," Barry said. "We need to show people what we do here."

The private rooms aren't part of the tours, but Barry gives visitors an idea of the spaces by taking them into a similar 10-by-10-foot office.

The emergency shelter accommodates 42 women and children, housing men separately. The expansion will make room for 78 people, including some private rooms for single occupants. The agency serves about 6,000 people annually through counseling, support groups, civil legal assistance and court advocacy.

Underground Railroad also offers transitional apartment housing for people moving out of the shelter and has a state grant for long-term rental housing for abuse survivors. Clients moving into transitional apartments or permanent homes will have vouchers to shop in the store.

Donors can sponsor a bed for \$2,500 or a room for \$10,000. Plaques in the shelter will honor contributors. Bedding and furnishings also are needed.

Through Monday, Sept. 1, the Saginaw County Community Foundation has promised to match anonymously dollar for dollar donations up to \$50,000 -- which could generate a total of \$100,000.

Monday, Aug. 25, the agency will target radio and television personalities in a pledge drive that brings them to the shelter for the day, where they must call on support.